

By Dean Rhodes*Smoke Signals editor*

KLAMATH FALLS – An inaugural interTribal Water Healing Ceremony was held Saturday, April 16, and hosted by the Klamath Tribe at Moore Park.

Grand Ronde Tribal members Jack Giffen Jr. and Kathleen George represented the Tribe, as well as Cultural Advisor Bobby Mercier, Communications Director Sara Thompson, Tribal Police Chief Jake McKnight and Lieutenant Tim Hernandez, and Youth Council representatives Angey Rideout, Se-qh'iya Simmons, Tasina Bluehorse and Lyli Rideout. In addition, Mercier family members Tammy Fisher, Nakoa and Kaikanim Mercier and Jacob Holmes attended.

George said during the Tuesday, April 19, Legislative Action Committee meeting that the ceremony was first proposed by the Grand Ronde Tribe, enthusiastically embraced by the other Oregon Tribes and grew out of a letter all nine Oregon Tribes sent to Gov. Kate Brown in September 2021 expressing concern about water quality within the state.

In the letter, the Tribes requested Brown create a Tribe-Agency Water Vision Task Force that would “fully coordinate the vision and goals of a holistic water vision.”

“This is the Tribes really standing up and signaling that we see how dire the challenges to our waters and our fisheries are,” George said. “We don’t see that reflected in most of the state dialogue. People are interested in other things. They’re not interested in saving our native fisheries. While the Tribes, on the other hand, whose cultures utterly depend on our rivers and our fisheries see, in many cases, our native fisheries on the brink of extinction.”

Tribal Council member Jon A. George created a painting on a deer hide to present to the host Klamath Tribe and Giffen coordinated transporting more than 75 pounds of elk to Klamath Falls as a donation for the ceremony’s feast.

Kathleen George said the Tribes are planning on the ceremony becoming an annual event. “There was such positivity around this event,” she said. “It was a very powerful day.”